

MORAL UNIVERSALIZABILITY: A KANTIAN APPROACH

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It would not be an exaggeration if we profess that the principle of universalizability is one of the most important criterion of determining morality. Although it was Hare who in his *Freedom and Reason* directly introduced the term universalizability as an important mark of his theory of prescriptivism, but we think it was Kant who first, though indirectly, introduced and subsequently employed the theory of universalizability in his moral philosophy, more specifically in his first formulation of *categorical imperative*. Besides Hare and Kant, we also sense the concept of moral universalizability in Rule-utilitarianism as well as in Sartrean moral philosophy. However, the objective of this paper is to explore in what sense and how far Kantian moral theory is claimed to be universalizable.

Before delving into this issue, let us address one point. There is no question of doubt that the concept of universal is a logical concept. More succinctly, it can be said that logical propositions can be interpreted in terms of universal. Thus, logical propositions, such as ‘All men are mortal’ or ‘No men are moral’ are universal in the sense that in each case the predicate term in such propositions either universally affirms or denies the subject term. Secondly, it can also be said that since logic is formal based on the form or structure of an argument, once a structure of an argument is valid any argument whatsoever that can be assimilated with this structure can equally be valid without exception. This again confirms the logical universality of logical argument. However, when we are talking of universalisability in ethics, we are rather talking differently. Here one would like to say that what is good to one can equally be good to every other human being. For example, if the moral action such as “one ought to do x” is good to “a”, then it ought to be good to everyone. The fulfillment of this moral principle deserves so many clarifications and unless and until a moral standard has not been set up, it would be difficult to establish the view that moral judgments are universalisable.

Since ethics in general deals with ought questions, ethical laws or maxims always have the propensity to be universalizable. One should not, however, confuse the term ‘universalizability’ with the term ‘universal’. Universal means all without exception and we can use this concept in logic, known as Universal Generalization or Universal Instantiation. However, when we are dealing with the term ‘universalizability’ in moral philosophy, it means to say that moral or ethical principles are not universal straightway; they have the potentiality to be universal. More succinctly, we can say that deductive argument can be valid universally and the canons of deductive argument can also be applied universally. Ethical rules and principles in this sense can never be universal as like logic there is no *decision procedure* in ethics through which it can be guided. There is no logical luck in logic as logic unlike ethics is formal, whereas there are moral lucks in ethics which stand beyond the control of moral agents. Moreover following Wittgenstein *Tractatus*, it can be said that there is nothing accidental in logic. However, in the case of moral universality one cannot overlook ‘moral luck’ which actually may

vitiates or stands as an obstruction of making some moral action universalizable. This would, however, not be the case in the logical universalizability. Unlike moral, logic is formal and what is formal is above of moral luck or external factors. The cornerstone of morality is to generalize ethical rules and principles and Kantian principle of morality plays an important role in this direction. The principle of morality as understood by Kant is embedded in his first principle of *Categorical Imperative* where he proclaims: “Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”¹ This principle is known as the principle of moral universalizability or Kant’s first moral principle. During our discussion we do not delve into the debate whether the principle of moral universalizability is the necessary or sufficient or both necessary and sufficient conditions of morality or not. Rather we propose to lay bare in what sense Kant conceives the principle of moral universalizability and how far his view of moral universalizability is tenable.

One of the notable features of Kantian principle of moral universalizability is that it is logically or excessively formal in the sense that it does not take account of individual situations, personal differences. It does not take into account facts that might be regarded as an excuse. In this regard Kantian principle of moral universalizability is inviolable and hence admits no exception. So the negation of this principle of universalizability would not be possible. The other important aspect of this principle of moral universalizability is that it would not be self-defeating. Since the principle of moral universalizability rules out exception, there we do not find any counter case or moral dichotomy that can violate the principle under consideration. To say that a principle is universalizable, whether moral or non-moral, equally means to say that it ought to be applied or abided by everyone without exception. This is what Kant has conceived in his first formulation of his categorical imperative. When a moral principle is claimed to be universalizable by virtue of the fact that it should be abided by everyone, it then logically entails that the principle under consideration would not be self-defeating.

According to Kant universal morality is valid for all rational human beings. In this regard, Kant suggests an ultimate justification of morality, first, by rejecting the relevance of empirical content for universal moral principles and secondly, by affirming universal human reason as the source and authority of all moral principles. Fox says, “Kant formulates the supreme principle of morality, arriving at it what he takes to be purely *a priori* manner. By a categorical imperative....he means a moral command whose force is absolute, which applies equally to all men and in every actual or possible moral situation.”² In Kant’s own words it can be said that ‘we must admit that its (morality’s) law must be valid not merely for men, but for all rational creatures generally, not, merely under certain contingent conditions or with exceptions, but with *absolute necessity*.”³ According to Kant moral law applies to all rational beings and that all moral conceptions have their seat and origin completely apriori in the reason that they cannot be obtained by abstraction from any empirical or contingent sources. Although the so-called moral relativism was not developed at the time of Kant, but his own moral reflection

¹ Paton, H.J.: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Moral*, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1964, p.30.

² Fox, Marvin. :*Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. Thomas K. Abbott, 1949, “Introduction”, pp.xiii-xiv

³ *Ibid.* p.26.

suggests that there is no place of moral relativism in ethics. If moral laws or norms are conditioned culturally or derived from experience, or history, or anthropology, they do not deserve to be categorized as moral. Kant tells us that a maxim of our action can only be treated moral law, if it conforms to a universal law and it is this conformity alone that makes the imperative as necessary.

The moral universalisability of Kant is the outcome of universal law which is applicable to or valid for every rational being without exceptions. According to Kant if the maxim which seeks to justify a particular exception were universalized, it would result in self-contradiction. For example, breaking a promise is a case in point. Kant therefore wishes to equate universality with necessity and absoluteness. The latter, however, is based on Kant's apriori conceptions of morality as obedience to moral law, and of moral laws as an expression of universal human reason. The universality and necessity of moral law, Kant contends, presupposes and implies the autonomy of will as determined by pure reason and the dignity of moral agent. This would again reflect at length that the foundation of categorical imperatives actually hinges on the axiomatic truth that "rational nature exists as an end in itself" Thus, the second formulation of the categorical imperative which commands to treat humanity in every person as an end in itself, and never as a means.⁴ According to Kant the will of every rational being is a 'universal legislative will' which in turn is determined by universal reason. Autonomy or freedom is the property of all rational beings and reason and freedom are equated, together characterizing the moral agent. For Kant reason is in some sense transcendental and human will shares in that transcendental nature.

It seems clear to us that Kant deliberates a rational approach in establishing his theory of moral universalizability. In fact it has been supported by a large numbers of ethical thinkers that a morality would not be worth being called one unless it is willing to be put to rational tests and to provide a rational justification for its principles and standards. Kant himself asserted that our moral principles have their source in reason which is both universal and transcendental. The rational categorical imperative, Kant maintains, is the source of the maxims of our actions. We think, following Kant, that the conception of moral imperative as categorical and of reason as universal and transcendental gives rise to the surest foundation to universal morality. In fact, Kant's own finding of morality on universal reason as shared by all persons could provide the greatest ground or foundation for any assertion of universal morality. In this regard the comment of Thomas is particularly relevant. Thomas says, "In appealing to the reason which Kant thought to be universally the same in all men, we transcend the limitations of particular societies and cultures, and we free ourselves from any considerations of individual difference among men....For to consider difference among men and cultures would mean to restrict morality to a realistic or even an individualistic subjectivistic foundation. The good would then differ from person to person, and society to society. If on the other hand, we are able to ground the morality in reason alone, then we have achieved the foundations of a universal morality, whose basic principles, like the rules of logic and mathematics, are the same for all men, in all places and for all times."⁵ It is

⁴ *Ibid.* p.46.

⁵ Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 1984, trans., Thomas K. Abbott, Introduction, pp.ix-x

further contended that since the maxims of our actions can be justified on the basis of the categorical imperative, the latter, being a rational principle, does not require another principle to justify. That means a rational principle is self-validating and it immensely assists us to avoid infinite regress in moral reasoning. Thomas says, “A rational principle carries its own obligatory force for all rational creatures. When for example, a man recognizes the validity of a conclusion, he is no longer denies its logical claims. It forces itself upon him, and he cannot escape it. “In precisely similar fashion the rational moral principle is self-validating, and carries his own binding force. To a rational creature its obligatory character becomes immediately evident...”⁶

As far as the Kantian principle of moral universalizability is concerned, there we find two versions of it; namely, maxim version or maxim oriented universalizability and will version or will oriented universalizability. A maxim is said to be universalizable if it would be practiced by everyone without exception. On the contrary, a certain maxim is universalizable if the moral agent can consistently *will* that the maxim under consideration is practiced by everyone in their dealings with each other. The will version of moral universalizability, so to speak, would be the guiding force of designating a certain maxim to be universalizable. It is the will of the moral agent that designates a certain maxim to be universalizable. However, this does not make sense to say that a consistently willable maxim has been a universal practice. The term universal practice may be interpreted in two ways. In one sense it would mean that everyone has the right to act on that maxim and in other sense it would mean that everyone exercising that right. To say that a maxim is consistently willable towards universal practice is to say that everyone has the right to act on that maxim. Here the question of one’s ability of doing that act simply does not arise. Accordingly, we can standardize the principle of moral universalizability as conceived by Kant like this: A maxim is thought to be universalizable if everyone has the right to act on that maxim irrespective of anyone’s doing or having the capacity of doing the type of action required by the maxim in question. In this sense Kantian principle of moral universalizability at times designated as absolute.

So far we are involving ourselves in discussing that the maxim of an act is willable as a universal law. Does it make sense to say that the maxim of an action is different from the action itself? Kant elsewhere mixes up the maxim of an action with the action itself. Kant says, “The rule of the judgment according to the laws of pure practical reason is this: asks yourself whether, if the action you propose were to take place by the law of the system of nature of which you were yourself a part, you could regard it as possible by your own will. Everyone does, in fact, decide by this rule whether actions are morally good or evil. Thus, people say: If everyone permitted to deceive when he thought it to his advantage; or thought himself justified in shortening his life as soon as he was thoroughly weary of it or looked with perfect indifference on the necessity of other...”⁷ The above passage clearly indicates that Kant did not make any significant distinction between the maxim of an action and the action itself. Arguably, there we do not find any significant distinction between “If everyone acted in that way...” and “If everyone acted on that maxim...” In fact it makes no difference in the application of the principle of

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 98.

⁷ Kant: *Practical Reason*, p.192.

moral universalizability. The question then is: if there underlies no significant distinction between ‘the maxims of an action’ and ‘the action itself’, then what would be the justification of the introduction of the term ‘maxim’ in Kantian principle of moral universalizability? Of course, the introduction of maxim in the principle of moral universalizability has certain edge. It guides us that the principle of moral universalizability can be used not simply as a test of maxims or rules of actions, but also as a test of maxims or rules of actions. Although it is partially true to say that we do not always adopt a policy in advance and thus do not always act on rules that we make for ourselves, nevertheless we at times rules of action whether we act on them or not. For example someone might undertake the maxim always to be polite to people or someone else might resolve to speak the truth always. There can be no doubt that people very often prefer to undertake such maxim for guiding their future. The logical force of the principle of moral universalizability can be used to determine not simply whether a particular action, which may or may not be acted with someone’s self-imposed rule, is right or wrong, but also whether such maxims are right or wrong in context to all moral agents. It aims at to determine what would happen if everyone in certain circumstances decided to act on such a maxim.

II

Moral Standardization of the principle of moral universalizability:

So far we have discussed the very meaning of the term of moral universalizability. In this section let us examine in what sense Kantian principle of moral universalizability could be standardized. Kant himself explicates his principle of moral universalizability by citing the example of false or lying promise. According to Kant to make a false promise is to make a promise without the intention of keeping it. There is no question of doubt that the person who makes a false promise is very much aware at the time of promising that he will not keep it. On the contrary, the person who makes a true promise is equally very much conscious at least at the time of his promising that he will keep it. It is, therefore, an integral part of the meaning of a promise that one who promises to do something intends to do what he has promised to do. This is all about the meaning of promising. This does not, however, makes sense to say that it would not be impossible to make a promise without the intention of keeping it, nor does it mean to say that every promise must be promised to be made honestly. However, what Kant wishes to suggest is that there always underlies a general assumption that promises are made honestly, otherwise the very meaning of promise would be vitiated. This is needed simply because of the fact that if we could not ordinarily assume that a promise that was made to us was made with the intention of keeping it, then ‘there could properly be no promise at all.’ Accordingly, it could not be willed to be a universal law that everyone may make any promise he pleases with the intention not to keep it, for such a law would make promising and the very purpose of promising itself impossible. When a promise was made, it would generally be assumed that the promise was made honestly and that is why it would presume that the promise ought to be kept. If anyone were to break any promise he pleases, i.e. if everyone tends to break his own promises whenever he feels, then this would make promising and the very purpose of promising itself impossible. In such a case it would not be willed to be a universal law that everyone may break a promise anytime he pleases, and one who wishes to do could not be willing to have anyone else do the same. The reason is that if everyone else did the same, it would not be possible to

make any promise at all. The reason is very simple. Every promise requires at least two parties, the person who promises and the person to whom it has been promised. That means it is a transaction involving two parties and one could not be willing to have other people break their promises to him. One who wishes to break any promise does not consider promises as binding on him. Arguably, if promises are not binding on them it means to say that promises are binding on no one and this is self-contradictory.

The example of false promise as discussed above clearly indicates in what sense Kant understands his principle of moral universalizability. Kant tries to show in what sense the negation of the principle of moral universalizability involves into a self-contradiction. Since the moral principle as adopted by Kant is absolute in nature, it rules out any sort of violation, moral dichotomy and moral contradiction. It is context free. Elsewhere in the *Groundwork* Kant wishes to claim that there are certain ends that every rational person, by virtue of his rationality, would necessarily 'will', certain purpose that every rational being necessarily has. Kant himself gives importance on individual rationality as he senses that individual rationality would play the all important role in fulfilling the motto of moral universalizability. Here lies the relevance of coherence kind of twines between *freedom and responsibility*. In fact individual freedom and individual responsibility are the two important keys of understanding Kantian form of moral universalizability. It is important to mention here that there is a general perception which states that freedom and responsibility are two opposite terms that can not be co-related and the question of their coherence simply does not arise. But Kant thinks the other way round. For Kant individual responsibility and freedom are not apposite in nature. Every individual must be an autonomous moral agent; otherwise the sanctity of his moral action would be vitiated. At the same time by virtue of possessing rationality, the individual being as moral agent, must be responsible for his action. So like Hare, Kantian ethics is the outcome of the byproduct of both freedom and responsibility. Kant elsewhere maintains that a person who does not wish to cultivate his talent may conceive that 'he cannot precisely will that this should become a universal law of nature. This, Kant conceives, is wrong on his part, for being a rational agent he should necessarily will that all his powers should be developed. So the concept of moral universalizability as conceived by Kant actually hinges on two important notions, such as, the impossibility of willing as such examined by citing the case of false promise and the notions of essential or rational ends. Although these two notions are thought to be the distinct interpretation of the principle of moral universalizability, but in reality they are the two sides of the same coin and one may be the subset of another. Whether the criterion of 'the impossibility of willing as such' is a sub-class of the idea of 'what rational being would necessarily will' would be a matter of dispute or not, but what we think of, of course, undisputedly is that when Kant conceives that it is impossible to will that a certain maxim should become a universal law, he thereby means that the consequences of everyone's acting on that maxim would be undesirable. This is how the principle of moral universalizability can be standardized.

We think that the concept of moral universalizability as comprehended by Kant can best be approached by Paton. According to Paton, Kantian principle of moral universalizability is the outcome of 'a systematic harmony of purpose'. Paton says, "If we wish to test the maxim of a proposed action we must ask whether, if universally adopted, it would further a systematic harmony of purposes in the individual and the

human race. Only if it would do this can we say that it is fit to be willed as a universal moral law... When we ask whether we can will a proposed maxim as if it were to become thereby a law of nature, we are asking whether a will which aimed at a systematic harmony of purposes in human nature could consistently will this particular maxim as a law of human nature.”⁸ If we carefully go through the principle of moral universalizability of Kant, it would seem clear to us that Paton’s own observation of Kant deserves special significance even though Kant did not clearly state that this is what he had in mind. However, in his *Practical Reason*, Kant conceives that the idea of systematic harmony would seem to be involved in his principle of moral universalizability. Kant says, “Whereas in other cases a universal law of nature makes everything harmonious; here, on the contrary, if we attribute to the maxim the universality of a law, the extreme opposite of harmony will follow the greatest opposition, and the complete destruction of the maxim itself and its purpose.”⁹ Even in his ‘Lectures on Ethics’ Kant echoes the same and says that if the will of moral agent is subordinated to the dictates of ends universally valid, it will be in harmony with all human purposes. And this is the way through which its inherent goodness can be found. Moral goodness, Kant conceives, consists of in the submission of our will to rules whereby all our voluntary actions are brought into a harmony which is universally valid. This indicates that the principle of moral universalizability requires the harmony of all free will. The principle of moral universalizability would be fulfilled if our harmonious actions are required by the moral rule or maxim. In this regard Kant makes a contrast between a moral maxim and a pragmatic maxim. A pragmatic maxim like a moral maxim makes our actions consistent with our own will; but unlike a moral maxim a pragmatic maxim will not bring then (actions) into harmony with the will of others. Kant therefore proclaims that ‘we must have rules to give our actions universal valid and to mould them into a general harmony. These rules are derived from the universal ends of mankind, and they are the moral rules.’¹⁰

Critical Observations:

Kantian principle of moral universalizability as expressed by the sentence: “We must be able to will that a maxim of our action should become a universal law” often makes confusion and therefore difficult to apprehend. It has been out rightly criticized by many on the account that such principle lacks its foothold as far as its application is concerned. It is criticized by saying that Kantian principle of moral universalizability would be an empty formulation as it was based on ethical absolutism or ethical rigorism. Some other would like to say that Kantian theory of moral universalizability would definitely be wrong if not absurd. Here we particularly call upon the name of Field who says, “The notion of the test of universalization as a practical criterion has been unanimously rejected by the critics, and doubtless with good reason. The arguments against it are probably familiar to every student in the elementary stages of moral philosophy. We have all been introduced very early to the figure of the innocent man pursued by murderers whose life can be saved by a timely life. There is no need to work

⁸ Paton, H.J. *The Moral Law*, p.31.

⁹ Kant: *Practical Reason*, p.137-38.

¹⁰Kant: *Lectures on Ethics*, p.17.

over this well-trodden ground again.”¹¹ It is observed that Kant’s way of connecting the principle with the particulars rule of morality seems to involve that each such rule or maxim should be treated as in itself universally. He conceives the universal principle of morality as a formal principle of self-consistency and thereby conceives each of the moral rules as an absolute law. The most vital question then is: how the formal principle can be used to determine the relation of different rules which express the different interest in the moral life? Is it not absurd to claim that an ethical maxim relating to individual action would be universalizable? Is the principle of moral universalizability subjectively objective? In fact, in standardizing moral law in the sense of absolute law, Kant himself misapplied his own principle of moral universalizability. Thus, it is claimed that the Kantian principle of moral universalizability is not tenable in the true moral sense.

It is further contended that the moral principle that ‘it is one’s duty to speak the truth, if it were taken singly and unconditionally, would make all societies impossible. In fact the moral standard can vary from society to society and different societies are guided by different moral standards. The question naturally crops up in mind is that how can it be possible that different societies having different moral standards follow the unconditional principle of veracity as echoed by Kant? The very meaning of the term ‘the unconditional principle of veracity’ is that truth in utterances that cannot be avoided in the formal duty of a man to everyone, however great the advantages that may arise from it to him or any other. Kant further conceives that although there is nothing wrong to tell a lie to a person who unjustly compels him to speak, but he (Kant), of course, does wrong to men in general in the most essential point of view. Kant says, “A lie ...always injures another; if not another individual, yet mankind generally, since it violates the source of justice.”¹² Kant inclines to say that although lying does not injure one particular individual, but still it is thought to be wrong as it would injure mankind in general. To tell a lie, even in the situation cited above, must hurt mankind generally, because it would be wrong to tell a lie. A lie would remain as a lie in whatever situation one makes a lie as it would violate the source of justice. This again is question bagging as it would miss the point what has been raised above. In fact, what Kant has said above is not relevant to the principle of moral universalizability based on categorical imperative. Critics would like to say that instead of arguing that it would be wrong to lie in such a situation because it could not be willed to be a universal law that everyone do so, Kant contents himself with the assertions: “To be truthful (honest) in all declarations is therefore a sacred unconditional commands of reason, and not to be limited by any expediency”¹³

The duty of veracity, according to Kant, is an unconditional duty which must be maintained in all circumstances. In fact, the rule of veracity by its very nature rules out exceptions and any sort of violation of such rule would be self-contradictory. Having said this, what is mostly noted here is that the rule of veracity is the outcome of categorical imperative and it may not be relevant to the principle of moral universalizability. If the rule of veracity is taken into account, it has to be applied without exception in forfeiting the situation whatever it may be. Arguably, this is supposed to be wrong as ethical evaluation can not ignore the sort of situation or circumstances in which an action is

¹¹ Field, G.C. ‘Kant’s First Moral Principle’ *Mind*, Vol.XLI, January, 1932, p.19.

¹² Abbott, p.262.

¹³ *Ibid.* p.363.

performed. We have noted that in formulating the principle of moral universalizability Kant has cited an example of false lying and thereby asserted that it would always wrong to make a promise which is not kept. Kant says, "I can indeed will a lie, but I can by no means will a universal law of lying; for such a law there could properly be no promise at all, since it would be futile to profess a will for future action to others who would not believe any profession or who, if they did so over hastily, would pay me back in like coin; and consequently my maxim, as soon as it was made universal law, would be bound to annual itself."¹⁴ For Kant it would be self-contradictory to say that everyone has the right to make a false promise whenever he feels. It is the very meaning of the nature of promise, Kant conceives, that when one promises to do something he can generally be presumed to intend to do it. The phrase 'I promise' loses its very meaning if no one is keen to carry out his promise. All that Kant has intended to show that it is generally wrong without exception. When Kant proclaims that a lie is wrong or a false promise is wrong without exception, he thereby means to say that a false promise is wrong in every situation or circumstance whatever the circumstance or situation may be. This assertion of Kant is again question begging. It is always possible to imagine situations where everyone may make a false promise in those situations without making 'promising' and the very purpose of promising itself impossible. Quite contrary to Kant, it would be self-contradictory to maintain that lying is always wrong, because the reasons in terms of which the rule is established are the very same reasons which, in certain circumstances, would suffice to override it. For example, telling a lie owing to save an innocent person from harm is precisely of this type.

Let us explain this point by citing an example. Let us suppose that the person A is hiding in B's house which is known to B. The murderer arrives all in sudden in B's house along with C and asks B whether A is in his house or not. In this situation B has various options to answer the murderer. B may be answered to the murderer or may not be answered to the murderer truly. Further suppose that if B were turn down to answer then he (B) and C will be killed. If B can tell the truth that A hides in B's house, then A would be murdered. Finally, B can answered to the murdered by telling a lie in order to save the life of A, C and B himself. However, the moral question is: could it be willed to be a universal law that everyone should lie in the sort of situation just mentioned? Kant however would rule out such proposal. Instead of voicing such question, Kant simply proclaims the duty of veracity as 'an unconditional duty which holds in every circumstance'. We think what is stated above is very much from the perspective of situational ethics where the so-called ethical standard would be determined in terms of situation. Kantian ethics by no means is situational. Accordingly, it can be said that the objections rose against Kant in the above were not as much as effective as they appear to be.

Kant further conceives that it would always be wrong to lie even in a situation of the type described. In this regard, Kant has cited the principle of humanity or personality. Kant says, "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end." Applying this principle in the case of lying cited above Kant says, "The man who has in mind to make a false promise to others ...is intending to make use of

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.48-49.

another man merely as a means to an end he does not share. For the man whom I seek to use for my own purposes by such a promise cannot precisely agree with my way of behaving to him, and so cannot himself share the end of the action."¹⁵ Since the murderer could not possibly share the end of the action, nor possibly agree to have a lie told to him, it would therefore be wrong to lie to him. For Kant, to lie to someone is always, no matter what the purpose of lying it, to treat him merely as a means. Kant has vehemently said that one who tells a lie is not only treating the person lied to as a mere means, but is mistreating 'humanity in his own person'. This makes sense to say that by making a lie to a person, he is treating himself as a mere means. When a person considers himself as a mere means, it means that there underlies something defective about the so-called principle of personality. However, Kant elsewhere equates the principle of moral universalizability with the principle of personality.

It is further claimed that there are many actions condemned by Kant whose maxims can be universalized. Suicide, for example, is a case in point. It is our duty, Kant inclines to say, not to commit suicide. However, many would like to say that there is nothing self-contradictory about a prospective suicide willing that everyone else commit suicide. The categorical imperative—the cornerstone of the principle of moral universality—does not show suicide per se to be immoral. There is no reason, it is contended, why it cannot be willed to be a universal law that everyone may take his own life 'if its continuance threatens more evil than it promises pleasure', provided that in doing so one does not violate the rights of another. There is no reason why the universal adoption of this maxim would be self-defeating. For example, one's maxim in the case, it should be noted, is not simply to commit suicide, but to commit suicide if further life appears to be unbearable. We think what is relevant to this issue is to decide whether suicide is moral or immoral. If it is thought to be moral, what would be the evidence for this? Suicide, however, may be comprehended both as moral as well as immoral. When, for example, suicide involves an obligation to another, then it is said to be immoral and in this regard, it cannot be said to be universalizable. However, there are other cases in which no one's rights are violated in committing suicide. In such a case what ground is there for maintaining it to be wrong? By telling suicide as not wrong, we are, of course, not recommending suicide; rather do we propose to say that there are cases where suicide is not immoral, it is almost senseless to be presumed as wrong. Preserving one's life not as a means to an end but as an end in itself is the sole objective of every person and it is morally universalizable. In this regard, it can be said that attempt to make suicide is the outcome of unbalanced mind as it goes against the natural propensity of humans. However, one cannot rule out the greatest hedonism arising out of one's suicide. To commit a suicide by a freedom fighter in the true sense of the term is not only the act of greatest hedonism; it would equally be treated as an act of moral instance containing singularity. There is thus good reason to believe that the principle of moral universalizability has not been adequately sorted out. A principle is thought to be universalizable when everyone or merely everyone thinks it to be inviolable. Kantian principle of moral universalizability at times fails to deserve this rank.

Kant has been criticized by saying that his categorical imperative is empty as it has no content. Consequently, it fails to provide an supreme norm or standard for

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

morality. As Kant's ethics of the categorical imperative allows of no exception and is therefore said to be an absolutist and rigorous doctrine. The revival of virtue ethics would criticize Kant for neglecting the surroundings of our social life, the situation, the external factors or moral luck. Ethics without emotion, love, care compassion, friendship would be completely fruitless. By attributing his categorical imperative absolute, Kant seems to reject any possibility of exceptions to moral principles or imperatives. He inclines to say that the moral law and the maxims based on categorical imperatives are applicable to, or obligatory upon, every human being under all possible circumstances and in this process he rules out moral exceptions. For Kant there is no scope of moral exception or moral dilemma in morality guided by categorical imperatives.

M.G. Singer has argued that Kant has interpreted his categorical imperatives in such a rigid manner that leaves no scope for considerations of the special circumstances of particular situations. Singer contends that if lying can save a life of an innocent person, then there is nothing wrong with it. Exception, says Singer, must be granted even in cases of universal and uncontroversial moral imperatives. Singer further contends that Kant perhaps confuses the term 'categorical'. Singer conceives two senses of the term 'categorical' as in one sense it is opposed to hypothetical and in other sense it is unconditional, absolute and exceptionless. Singer believes that by confusing these two senses of the term categorical, he makes an easy transition from the first innocent meaning of the 'categorical' to the second meaning which is contestable. Kant ethical argument, Singer concludes, arguments can only prove that lying or making false promise is generally wrong, but not that it is unconditionally wrong or wrong in all circumstances without exception.¹⁶

We also observe interesting remarks even from Hare who has developed as well as modified Kantian ethical universalism. Hare agrees with Kant on the issues such as: (a) conceiving ethical assertions as imperatives; (b) asserting the essential universal character of all moral imperatives and (c) affirming freedom or autonomy of will as equally essential for the authenticity of ethical imperatives. However, Hare disagrees with Kant as unlike Kant; Hare does not elaborate ethical system on the foundations of his implicit metaphysical assumptions of the universal reason shared by all human being and the freedom or legislating power of the noumenal self. That means Kant's principle of moral universalism hinges on metaphysical foundation, while Hare's own account of moral universalism is contrary to that of Kant. Hare not only rejects and criticizes Kantian transcendentalism; he equally rejects Kantian absolutism and thereby accepts various possibilities of exception to a given moral law. Hare's own conclusion is that

Kantian principle of moral universalizability which stands with the principle that 'we must be able to will that a maxim of our action should become a universal law' has been vehemently criticized by Mill. Mill elsewhere remarks that Kant fails almost grotesquely to show that there would be any contradiction, any logical impossibility, in the adoption of all rational beings of the most outrageously immoral rules of conduct. All he shows, Mill opines, is that the consequences of their universal adoption would be such as no one would chose to incur. For Mill a rule even of utter selfishness could not possibly be adopted by all rational beings that- there is any insuperable obstacle in the nature of things to its adoption -cannot even be possibly maintained. Therefore to give

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.229.

any meaning to Kant's principle, Mill opines, the sense put upon it must be, that we ought to shape our conduct by a rule which all rational beings might adopt with benefit to their collective interest.¹⁷

Hegel's criticism against Kant is even more forceful than Mill. Hegel says, "The proposition: "Act as if the maxim of this action could be laid down as a universal principle", would be admirable if we already had determinate principles of conduct. That is to say, to demand of a principle that it shall be able to serve in addition as a determinant of universal legislation is to presuppose that it already possesses content. Given the content, then of course, the application of the principle would be a simple matter. In Kant's sense, however, this principle itself is still not available and his criterion of non-contradiction is productive of nothing, since where there is nothing, there can be no-contradiction either..."¹⁸ What Hegel wants to say above is that the Kantian principle of moral universalizability as guided by categorical imperative is itself a determinate principle of conduct already possesses a content. Accordingly, it is supposed to be applied in a vacuum with the possible exception of itself. Thus, Hegel's charges against Kant recall the common objection based on the slogan that 'Kantian ethics is an empty formalism'. To act in a certain way in certain circumstances in order to achieve a certain purpose, we already have a determinate principle of conduct something that already possesses a content to which the principle of moral universalizability as the outcome of categorical imperative can be applied. The ground reality is that although we have been given the content, but unfortunately the application of the principle is not always a simple matter.

Hegel further appears to conceive that if everyone stole, whenever and whatever he pleased, there would be no such thing as property and therefore the very purpose of stealing as such would be made impossible. This is exactly what Hegel means by his reference to 'the absence of property'. Hegel's own perception, we think, in somehow or other, has a simile with Wittgenstein's remarks that the principles of tautology and self-contradictory say nothing and therefore they are empty formalism. Kant, however, never says that 'the absence of property contains in itself' a contradiction. Neither Kant opines that the existence of property is not a logical necessity, nor even does he mean that it is a contradiction to commit theft or murder. Rather Kant's point is relatively simple one which is perhaps why the profundities of Hegel are so far from the mark. It could not be willed to be a universal law that everyone could steal whenever he wished to, for if everyone stole whenever he wished to, there would be no property and hence nothing to steal. Thus, stealing presupposes that there is such a thing as property-something to be stolen- and this presupposes some measure of stability in society. When someone wishes to steal something he thereby wishes to keep it as his property, but if everyone were to act in such a way, no one would be able to keep anything as his property, and hence there would in effect be no such thing as property. To put in another way: if everyone were to act in this way, no one would be able to do. Hence not everyone has the right to act in this way. Since not everyone has the right to steal, stealing as such is wrong. It recalls the generalization principle as echoed by Singer: what is right for one person must be right for every similar person in similar circumstances. Therefore, the conclusion 'no one has

¹⁷ See Mill *Utilitarianism*, Everyman's Library ed. New York, 1910, p.4

¹⁸ Hegel: *The Philosophy of Right*, trans., T. M. Knox, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1942, p.90.

the right to steal' is understood as 'no one has the right to steal without a reason or justification'. The very fact is that, at least we think, Kant in establishing his principle of moral universalizability conclusively nullified or boiled down the situation or circumstance in which the action, if any, is performed. However, if the circumstances of the act are such that everyone could steal in those circumstances, then his principle of moral universalizability may perhaps be inapplicable.

Many would like to criticize Kant by saying that Kantian principle of moral universalizability fails to overcome egoism. Sidgwick himself substantiates this argument against Kant. He goes on to say that we can certainly conceive that a man in whom the spirit of independence and the distaste for incurring obligations would be so strong that he would choose to endure any privations rather than receive aid from others. Even granting that, Sidgwick opines, everyone, in the actual amount of distress, must necessarily wish for the assistance of others; still a strong man, after balancing the chances of life, may easily think that he and such as he have more to gain, on the whole, by the general adoption of the egoistic maxim. Benevolence brings more trouble than profit. The difficulty is here in the reference to benevolence. The obligation to help others in need of help is not a matter of benevolence. Kant perhaps thought of it in this way. Benevolence—the doing of good to others—does beyond what one can normally be required to do. This is not to say that it must be wrong, but rather to say that it is not mandatory. Helping other in need of help is mandatory if one is in a position to do so. Undoubtedly, an egoist may easily think that he and such as he has more to gain by the adoption of the egoistic maxim and in that sense he may be right. This is, however, not to say it is moral. The egoistic maxim is the maxims not to help others when one is not in need of help one without receiving some tangible return. One can act on this maxim, but one who does so is immoral. For no one could be willing to have it adopted by others at his expense. Thus, no one could will it to be a universal law that everyone can act on it. If an egoist is somehow interested of others only in so far as it is conducive to his own, then he is certainly the last person in the world who could will egoism to be a universal law.

We think what is said above is based on subtle confusion, because Kant has never said that the relation of helping is symmetrical. He has never said that the reason why I ought to help those in need of help is that if I do not help them, they will refuse to help me when I am in need of help. He never believes that the consequence of my refusal to help others will be that they will refuse to help me and this is the only moral reason for which one has prompted to help others. Instead of that Kant rather thinks what will actually happen if everyone adopts this maxim, and not to what will happen if I do. Kant's principle therefore involves an appeal to what one could be willing to have happen. The appeal in the moral argument is not to the importance of so acting, but to its unfairness. Again by recalling false promise or lying, we can say that it is not at all true that if we should refrain from telling lies only because of universalized lying would defect itself, that would be the same as saying, "Don't be a fool, it does not pay."¹⁹ Truly speaking the purpose of lying would be defeated if everyone were to lie. However, this does not mean that a particular lie must be self-defeating or that 'does not pay'. It would be absurd to assume that if one person adopts a policy of lying, this will cause everyone to do, yet it is only on such an assumption that such an inference could be made.

¹⁹ Teale, A. E. *Kantian Ethics*, London, Oxford University Press, 1951, p.106